

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Swift Parrot *Lathamus discolor*
- Photo by Debbie Worland

A Swift but endangered Parrot

Everything you wanted to know about Swift Parrots but were afraid to ask was covered in a most interesting talk by conservation biologist Simon Kennedy at last months meeting. A few years ago Simon did an intensive field study of this endangered species during which he identified patches of bush favoured by the birds, and recorded their numbers and movements.

He started by playing a recording of the call of the Swift Parrot, and described the bird; look for the red under the wings in flight and the diagnostic red 'mask' on the face. Juveniles have no face mask and have a dark eye. As the name suggests, they fly very fast, and occasionally there are recorded fatalities from collisions with buildings.

Showing maps of various areas he had studied, he outlined the characteristic diurnal behaviour patterns - after a communal preen and gossip, they spread out from their roost sites in early morning to feed in smaller numbers in different areas, principally on nectar of profusely flowering eucalypts, but also on lerps and insect larvae. Like Lorikeets, with which they often mix, they are usually seen feeding high in the tree-tops, keeping up a chattering conversation. In the late afternoon all return to the same roost site, joining together in large numbers for the night. Often they roost in regrowth saplings only two or three metres high.

Migrating to the mainland each Autumn from their breeding areas in Tasmania, their distribution in a given year is highly dependent on the pattern of eucalypt flowering, especially in Grey Box and Ironbark. Last year was a local floral bonanza, and Castlemaine was blessed with a large flock of Swifties which took up residence at the golf course, and were

monitored by Debbie Worland from March to August. This year only four birds have been seen by Debbie, and this is the second highest count in Victoria according to Chris Tzaros. When the flowering is poor in Victoria, the birds head up the coast of NSW, sometimes as far as Brisbane.

Although there has been a good response to the volunteer surveys in May and August, the wide and varying distribution makes counts and movement tracking difficult. Simon points out that any sightings are valuable, and survey forms should be submitted. Due to improved technology, it will be possible in the near future to use satellite tracking of birds such as these.

Simon spoke of the on-going destruction of the dwindling habitat of the Swift Parrots in Tasmania. These birds seem to be dependent on mature trees for nest hollows, and owing to persistent policy of logging old growth forests, there are only small remnants of suitable habitat for them. As they have never been recorded using nest boxes, destruction of their nesting trees could have dire consequences.

Noel Young

All on a Winter's Afternoon...

Rita Mills

There are 12 members of the club who are glad they were brave enough give Simon Kennedy's advice and information about finding Swift Parrots a try out on a very cold, showery afternoon. He'd also given me advice as to the best spot to visit on Captains Gully Road, Sandon, though he wasn't able to go with us.

Soon after we'd stopped at the corner where Captains Gully/Sandon road veers away from Captains Gully Road itself we could hear what sounded like the calls of the Swift Parrots that Simon had played the evening before, and eventually we watched some 30 parrots behaving like he had described. The behaviour was right, the habitat was right, the timing was right - but the light was hopeless, and when the flock flew swiftly to the south it was impossible to see whether they had red under the wings - but *some* of us reckon they *had* to be Swift Parrots! A little later we also saw a very large flock of Red-rumped Parrots, but the behaviour was different and the birds sturdier in silhouette. Some were perched in dead branches, some were preening, and there were some feeding on the ground a little distance away, so we had a good look at them.

We also spotted at least half a dozen Jacky Winters, which have been scarce over recent years, 3 Sitellas, and about 10 White-browed Babblers.



A budding *Pterosylis robusta* at Captains Gully Rd - photo by Anne van Gemert

The only plants in flower were Drooping Cassinia *Cassinia arcuata* and a few Grey Box trees. However, there were lots of *Glossodia*, Chocolate Lily and Greenhood leaves, and a few buds of what is most likely the Large Striped Greenhood *Pterosylis robusta*, as the rosettes on the sterile plants had rounded, smooth edged leaves whereas the similar Striped Greenhood *P. alata* has wavy margins to the rosette leaves. That was a thrill for me as I haven't seen the plant for about 30 years when I was shown them at Barkers Creek - where a house now stands.

We had been going to move a bit further up the road, but the birds kept coming and we never did. It would be well worth another visit.

The complete list for the day of confirmed sightings is -

Shelduck, Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, White-throated Tree-creeper, Willie Wagtail, Magpie, Galah, Long-billed Corella, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, White-browed Babbler, Eastern Rosella, Varied Sitella, Kookaburra, Grey Shrike-thrush, Scarlet Robin, Golden Whistler (male) and a couple of thornbill species.

The SEANA Spring Camp
will be at the Grampians Retreat and Field Studies Centre
at the foot of Mt Abrupt near Dunkeld
Friday 2nd – Sunday 4th October, 2009

hosted by Hamilton Field Naturalists Club
 PO Box 591, Hamilton Vic 3300
 Email: hamiltonfnc@live.com.au

The Occurrence of Moths from the Superfamily Bombycoidea in the Mt Alexander Shire.

Chris Timewell

The recently released *Moths of Victoria Part 1.*, authored by Peter Marriott and published as a book and CD in 2008 by the Entomological Society of Victoria, provides Victorian distribution maps for all of the moth species from the superfamily Bombycoidea. Using these distribution maps and other accompanying information, the table below lists those moth species potentially occurring in the Mt Alexander Shire.

In summary, at least eight species from the superfamily Bombycoidea have been confirmed as occurring locally (although one of these may now be extinct from the area) and another 21 species are predicted to potentially occur. Not all of these species have been scientifically described and named. Of the six families of moths from the superfamily Bombycoidea that are known to occur within Victoria, two families are not expected to occur within the Mt Alexander Shire at all: the Eupterotidae (Bag Moths) and Bombycidae (the introduced Silk Worm).

Common and Latin names of Bombycoidea moths known to (K) or potentially (P) occur in the Mt Alexander Shire (primarily sourced from distribution maps in *Moths of Victoria. Part 1* and also *Morton 2007*):

Latin Name	Common Name	Occurrence and other Notes
<u>Family ANTHELIDAE</u>	<u>ANTHELIDS</u>	
<i>Anthela acuta</i>	Common Anthelid	P. Local area on margin of suspected distribution
<i>Anthela denticulate</i>	Toothed Anthelid	P.
<i>Anthela ferruginosa</i>	Rusty Anthelid	P.
<i>Anthela guenei</i>	(No common name provided.)	K. The type specimen, and only ever Victorian specimen, thought to be collected from Mt Alexander Range in 1852-55 (Marriot 2008).
<i>Anthela nicothoe</i>	Uricating Anthelid	P.
<i>Anthela ocellata</i>	Eye-spot Anthelid	P.
<i>Anthela replete</i>	Replete Anthelid	P. Local area on margin of suspected distribution
<i>Anthela varia</i>	Varied Anthelid	P.
<i>Chenuala heliaspis</i>	Rose Anthelid	P.
<i>Munychryia senicula</i>	(No common name provided.)	P.
<i>Pterolocera</i> – lined form	An unnamed grass Anthelid	P. Not yet taxonomically described
<i>Pterolocera</i> – reddish form	An unnamed grass Anthelid	P. Not yet taxonomically described

Latin Name	Common Name	Occurrence and other Notes
Fam. LASIOCAMPIDAE	<i>SNOUT MOTHS</i>	
<i>Entometa apicalis</i>	Gum Snout Moth	P.
<i>Entometa fervens</i>	Common Gum Snout Moth	K. Known to occur locally (Morton 2007).
<i>Genduara acedesta</i>	Painted Clear-winged Snout Moth	P.
<i>Genduara</i> sp. (unnamed)	(No common name provided)	K. Known to occur locally (Marriot 2008). Not yet taxonomically described.
<i>Genduara subnotata</i>	Clear-winged Snout Moth	P.
<i>Pararguda nasuta</i>	Wattle Snout Moth	K. Known to occur locally (Marriot 2008).
<i>Pararguda rufescens</i>	Rufous Snout Moth	P.
<i>Pernattia pusilla</i>	(No common name provided.)	P.
<i>Pinara divisa</i> Complex	Common Pinara	P.
<i>Porela delineate</i>	Lined Porela	P.
<i>Symphyta psaropis</i>	Pale Desert Snout Moth	K. Known to occur locally (Marriot 2008).
Family SATURNIIDAE	<i>EMPORER MOTHS</i>	
<i>Opodiphthera eucalypti</i>	Emperor Gum-moth	P.
<i>Opodiphthera Helena</i>	Helena Gum-moth	K. Known to occur locally (Morton 2007).
Family SPHINGIDAE	<i>HAWKS MOTHS</i>	
<i>Agrius convolvuli</i>	Convolvulus Hawk Moth	P.
<i>Hippotion celerio</i>	Speedy Hawk Moth	K. Known to occur locally (Morton 2007).
<i>Hippotion scrofa</i>	Coprosma Hawk Moth	K. Known to occur locally (Morton 2007).
<i>Hyles livorniciodes</i>	(No common name provided.)	P.

In preparing the table, I have not looked through the Museum of Victoria's collections or databases for additional local records. Similarly, I have not attempted to source additional local moth records from personal collections, with the exception of the moths described previously by Tony Morton within the *Castlemaine Naturalist* (2007, Volume 32.7). I expect that moth enthusiasts from within the Club will have Bombycoidea moth species that I have identified here as 'potentially' occurring in the Mt Alexander Shire within their own collections. I encourage those enthusiasts to confirm the presence of these species within the local area in a future newsletter. If members of the CFNC have a locally collected Bombycoidea moth that is not on this list at all, I also recommend contacting the Entomological Society of Victoria or the Museum of Victoria, as this may be evidence of an extension to a species' known range.

Short trip to Tasmania

Hans van Gemert

Recently, Anne and I were able to visit Tasmania for a week. We stayed in a resort at Shearwater which is on the mid north coast near Port Sorrell. It is on the estuary of the Rubicon River and directly opposite the Narawntapu National Park (which on old maps may be called the Asbestos Range National Park). Although we did not set out to do a lot of nature observation (the original plan was to do as little as possible), when in an unfamiliar environment it is almost impossible for us not to take an interest in new plants, birds, etc.

On our very first walk along the coast we found several birds whose calls and appearance required us to get out the binoculars and the books for identification. We will list the three birds we had never observed before.

We heard the **Yellow Wattlebird** well before we saw it. Its call is even more raucous than that of the Red Wattlebird which is more familiar to Victorians. The Tasmanian version is slightly larger and has large, yellow wattles which are very striking. It is common in coastal heath lands as well as in suburban gardens. There are other honeyeaters which are only found in Tasmania but we cannot claim to have seen them.

Shortly after this we came upon a group of Currawongs with their distinctive beaks and yellow eyes. But again, there was a noticeable difference. We are familiar with the Pied and Grey Currawongs but these were **Black Currawongs**, which only occur in Tasmania. They have white tips in their tails and wings but otherwise are completely black.

Northern Tasmania is also in drought and the wetlands in the National Park were completely dry and devoid of any waterbirds. On the grassy areas which would normally be under water we observed a lot of Common Wombats, Pademelons and Bennets Wallabies. Shortly after this we found a flightless bird identical in shape and size to our Swamphehen but without the red bill and legs and with a fairly uniform olive-brown colouring. It turned out to be the **Tasmanian Native Hen** which is common throughout the grass and farm land of the island.

Another bird we observed regularly was the **Forest Raven**. It is not exclusive to Tasmania as it also occurs in Southern Victoria and we have seen it in East Gippsland. It is the only corvid in Tasmania and can be distinguished in flight from the Australian Raven by its shorter but broader tail.

We made one other surprise discovery. We had stopped along the main road near Port Sorrell to admire a fairly new home with a prominent builders sign which advertised this as a 7.5 star energy efficient home. To our astonishment the home belonged to Phil Collier and Robyn Garnett, well-known former members of our club. They invited us in, showed us around and discussed their revegetation activities on the property which they have named "Rubicon Sanctuary". Even in Australia, it can be a small world.

Observations

- ◆ Observed in Maldon - flock of Dusky Woodswallows, a solitary Bogong Moth, in very poor condition on the ground in woodland near Maldon Station. A solitary Southern Forest Bat attached to clothing on a rack at Porcupine Village. Cranberry Heath throughout woodlands. Tree frogs calling throughout garden following rain - Gill Rayner
- ◆ A Koala was residing in a neighbour's tree for two months – Geoff Harris
- ◆ At Guildford, a pair of Kites observed playing with prey while flying; a Red capped Robin around the house; Wedge tailed Eagles possibly nesting, and a Spoonbill seen flying overhead – Natasha Harris
- ◆ Janet Fitzwater reported two Scarlet Robins seen in the Botanical Gardens, and Galahs pecking holes in bricks on the house walls – she resorted to playing loud music to discourage them
- ◆ Denis Hurley brought a nesting box with tube entrance to the meeting -Pardalotes had used it three times this season. He also mentioned bees taking over hollows.
- ◆ Another surprise from the Birdline website: 4th June – two male Rose Robins seen along the creek line at the far end of the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens by Helen O'Donnell - NY
- ◆ A Flame Robin seen at Taradale – Rita Mills
- ◆ A flock off 25 Yellow tailed Black Cockatoos at the Golf course; and the rain has brought on Orchids – Anne van Gemert
- ◆ Walking the Hobsons bay coastal trail (Altona – Williamstown) on 7th June, I noted the following birds - Coot, Dusky Moorhen, Eastern Swamphen, Black Duck, Darter, Black and Little Pied Cormorants, Pacific Gull, Black Swan, White Ibis, Chestnut Teal, Silver Gull, Pied Stilt, Crested Pigeon and Blue Wren – Richard Piesse
- ◆ A Sulpher crested Cockatoo making plaintive calls stayed in the Silky Oak tree overnight, and next day the calls were interspersed with “hello cocky” – Natalie de Maccus
- ◆ Chris Morris is having a Hitchcockian experience lately – after reporting the Cockatoos attacking his house last month, his garden is now being systematically demolished by a gang of Choughs!

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

May 2009

Fri July 10th meeting: GEOFF NEVILL: Threatened species (Orchids)

Sat July 11th field trip: Woodbrook Rd./Sales track.

Sat July 18th KABC roadside cleanup: contact Geoff Harris 5474 2244

Fri Aug 14th meeting: MICHAEL MARMACH: The Bogong High Plains

Sat Aug 15th field trip: to be announced

Fri Sept 11th meeting: BETH GOTT: Wild Food

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Natalies; 65 Johnstone Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2009

Ordinary membership: Single \$27, Family \$35

Pensioner or student: Single \$24, Family \$29

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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